

PRESS RELEASE

Developing World Conditions in Canada Impede Access to HIV/AIDS Care, Treatment and Support

For Immediate Release

July 21, 2010, Vienna – HIV/AIDS researchers, health-care professionals, AIDS service organizations and AIDS activists in Vienna for the XVIII International AIDS Conference expose shocking statistics revealing that, even in Canada, an affluent country where many treatments are accessible without cost, people are still becoming unnecessarily infected with HIV and falling ill, without being linked to treatment.

“It is incredible that Aboriginal babies are being born with HIV when free treatment exists to prevent mother-to-child transmission,” says Denise Lambert of the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network. In 2008, the new infection rate among Aboriginal persons was 3.6 times higher than among non-Aboriginal persons in Canada.¹ National HIV estimates also indicate that two thirds of all new HIV infections among Aboriginal people in 2008 were attributable to injection drug use, a proportion considerably higher than the 17 percent of overall new HIV infections in this category.² “In light of these figures, we are shocked and dismayed to be excluded from the discussion of science-based drug policy in the Vienna Declaration,” says Ms. Lambert.

Another grim reality is the infection rate among young people in Canada. “Young people are very vulnerable, especially young women,” says Jessica Whitbread, the Under 30 North American Rep for the International Community of Women with HIV. In 2008, young women between 15 and 19 years of age represented over half of all HIV-positive test reports in this age group.³

Stigma and discrimination also make it difficult for new Canadians to be linked to appropriate care. Marvelous Muchenje of Women’s Health in Women’s Hands reports that “the estimated new infection rate among individuals from HIV-endemic countries is about 8.5 times higher than among other Canadians.”

Similar disparities exist for prisoners. Amongst federal prisoners incarcerated in Canada, the HIV-prevalence rate of 4.6 percent rivals those of many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and is 15 times greater than that in the community as a whole. The figure is even more appalling for incarcerated Aboriginal women, of whom 11.7 percent are infected with HIV.³

“The individuals most affected by the Canadian government’s refusal to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of prisoners are those most marginalized in the community: people who use drugs, people suffering from mental illness, sex workers, women, and the Aboriginal community,” concluded Sandra Ka Hon Chu, Senior Policy Analyst at the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. “Comprehensive solutions that include science-based drug policy are urgently needed.”

CTAC’s Vice-Chair, Ron Rosenes, adds that “for a rich country, these statistics are appalling. Antiretroviral treatments are available in Canada. We should not be witnessing such high numbers of people getting diagnosed so late with AIDS and life-threatening illness to the extent that we are. It is clearly due to the marginalization, human rights violations, and great divide between rich and poor that still exist in our own country.”

We demand appropriate funding be allocated in the HIV strategy to remove the barriers at the root of this problem, including educational programs, access to prevention technologies including science-based drug policies, affordable housing, and adequate access to healthcare regardless of where you live.

Canadian Treatment Action Council (CTAC), Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN)

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A press conference will be held on July 21st, 2010, organized by the Canadian Treatment Action Council (CTAC), a non-governmental organization that promotes informed public policy and builds awareness on issues that impede access to treatment and healthcare for people living with HIV/AIDS, the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN), a non-profit coalition of individuals and organizations that provides leadership, support, and advocacy for Aboriginal people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, and the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, which promotes, through research, legal and policy analysis, education, and community mobilization, the human rights of people living with and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS in Canada and internationally.

French speaker will be available onsite.

References:

1. Estimates of HIV Prevalence and Incidence in Canada, 2008, CCDIC, PHAC.
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/aids-sida/publication/survreport/estimat08-eng.php>
2. Ibid.
3. HIV and AIDS in Canada, Surveillance Report to December 31, 2008. PHAC.
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/aids-sida/publication/survreport/2008/dec/index-eng.php>
4. Summary of Emerging Findings from the 2007 National Inmate Infectious Diseases and Risk-Behaviours Survey
<http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/rsrch/reports/r211/r211-eng.shtml>

